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SUNDAY-SCHOOL MUSIC.

THE MUSIC OF THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL AND ITS VALUE IN THE RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD

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Seminary.*

1. *The Worship of the Sunday School:*

An urgent need of the present day is a quiet, reverent, worshipful spirit in our boys and girls. The irresponsible and often disrespectful attitude of our average American children (and I am writing not from a swivel chair, but from personal contact with one hundred children every week) is due to several conditions; lack of authority and obedience in the home, insubordination to teachers and leaders, the loose talk of streets and theaters which tends to drag old age and parentage into ridiculous positions, an exaltation of personal liberty which indulges self at the expense of others, and the scientific spirit of the age which is substituting the nurture of cold analysis for the nurture of the finer emotions.

It is high time that the Sunday School maintain a rich, devotional service for her boys and girls. With no family prayers, no grace at meals, no worship in the day schools, no attractive mid-week services, no children's sermons on the Sabbath, the religious nurture of most young people rests almost entirely with the Sunday School and its thirty minutes out of ten thousand minutes a week for quiet, thoughtful, reverent worship! We are putting too much emphasis on the instructional side of Sunday school work and not enough on the devotional! "Christian character is caught, not taught." It is heat, not light that we need in dealing with children. Emerson understood this when he said:—"In my dealings with my child, my Latin and my Greek, my accomplishments and my money, stead me nothing, but as much soul as I have avails." We are prone to talk too much in our child training. Let us tread quietly, saying little but suggesting much. Let us have fewer statistics and more air castles, less of the academic and more of the visionary, less of two times two are four, and more of the imaginative spirit that draws crooked lines. It is the tragedy of life that our children so soon lose their day dreaming, their flights of fancy, their upspringing delights, their hyacinths, for they must needs buy loaves of bread with all their powers. Is there a lad who whistles at his work, who

sings in the market place, who is a poet in his merchandising; is there a girl who dreams dreams or is afire with fancy? Then there will be one less martinet at forty, one less automaton at fifty and one less icicle at sixty.

2. *The Hymnody of the Sunday School.*

The first known Christian hymn, outside of the New Testament, was written by Clement of Alexandria about 200 A. D. It is a catalogue of virtues as found in Christ Jesus, and in its simple, naïve exclamations, it is distinctly a children's hymn:—

“Bridle of untamed colts,
Wing of unwandering birds,
Sure helm of babes,
Shepherd of royal lambs:
Assemble thy simple children
To praise holily,
Christ, the guide of children.”

About the ninth century appeared another hymn for children, a hymn written behind prison bars by St. Theodulph for his choir boys:—

“All glory, laud and honor,
To Thee, Redeemer, King;
To whom the lips of children
Made loud hosannas ring.”

Three men of the early eighteenth century attempted to write hymns for infant minds in their didactic, doctrinal way. Of the three hymns written by Bishop Ken for the boys of Winchester school, the “Awake my soul and with the sun” is perhaps the best known, while all of his hymns closed with the incomparable doxology, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.”

A pretentious volume by Isaac Watts entitled “Divine and Moral Songs for Children” reached an unprecedented sale throughout the eighteenth century, and some of these hymns have ever remained household gems, such as “How doth the busy little bee,” “’Tis the voice of the sluggard,” “Let dogs delight to bark and bite” and the exquisite cradle song, “Hush, dear child, lie still and slumber.”

Of the 6500 Wesleyan hymns, many of which were designed for children and were scattered throughout the Wesleyan hymn books, only one has become immortal:—

“Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Thou wast once a little child.”

The real movement childward began about 1800 A. D. with the establishment of Sunday schools, the publication of magazines for children, such as the *Youth's Companion*, and the coming of women hymn writers with their deeper insight into child nature; Anne and Jane Taylor in 1810, Dorothy Thrupp in 1830, and Jemima Luke, Anne Shepard, Jane Leeson and Mrs. Alexander following in rapid succession with such child favorites as these:—

“Savior, like a shepherd lead us,”
 “Around the throne of God in heaven.”
 “Savior, teach me day by day.”
 “I think, when I read that sweet story.”

and the Alexander hymns which passed through one hundred editions:—

“Once in royal David's city”
 “There is a green hill far away”
 “Jesus calls us o'er the tumult” etc.

Another influence contributing to the growth of a sane hymnody for children during the early nineteenth century were the poets of nature such as Wordsworth, Kingsley, Shelley and Keats, who taught contemporaneous hymn writers the beauty and loveliness of this world. Mediaeval and early English hymns were so full of speculation as to the future world that the present world was forgotten. The earth to that age was a howling wilderness, and the plaintive refrain in modern phraseology was, “I want to be an angel.” But throughout the nineteenth century there is an ever growing volume of hymns that treat this life as a heaven on earth, as in “My God, I thank thee who hast made the earth so bright.” The poets of nature also taught a poetic finish, an elevation of style, a variety of meter and subject matter, heretofore unknown in hymnody. It used to be said of hymnists that they drank more of the Jordan than they did of the Helicon, that the hymn book was good worship but poor poetry. Judging from the old Bay Psalm Book, the first book published in America, 1636 A. D., this must have been true:—

“As the hart after the water brooks doth bray,
 So my heart panting after thee doth pray.”

or from a Sunday school hymnal published by a leading denomination as late as 1907:—

“Hear the tramp, tramp, tramp, of the Sunday school brigade,
 Whether rain or shine, we are always on parade;
 By our Savior led, in the sunshine of his love,
 We are marching on to the land of joy above.”

It is a relief to turn from this doggerel to these modern church hymns for children, the smooth flowing verse of "Brightest and best of the sons of the morning," or the marvelous detail of the hymn picture "O Jesus, thou art standing" or the narrative and picturesqueness of the Samuel story "Hushed was the evening hymn," or the arousement to loyalty and action as good soldiers of Christ in "The Son of God goes forth to war." There is yet another factor of nineteenth century origin that helped to build up an adequate hymnody for children. The Anglican hymn writers in following the Book of Common Prayer extended the subject matter of hymns to the widest possible periphery, giving us practically our first missionary and militant hymns, our first harvest and thanksgiving hymns, our first Christmas and Easter hymns, our first Sabbath and Bible hymns, and a fuller representation of the life of Christ and of the prophets and apostles. This is precisely what children need; less of the subjective and more of the objective, less of human frailty and more of God's love, less of heaven and more of earth and the church militant with its special days and special ceremonies, less of the blood and cross and more of the Wonder Worker, the Physician, the Good Shepherd and Friend of Children.

There are three classes of hymns that are still regnant in our Sunday school worship, which, in my judgment, are unsuited to the religious nurture of children.

1. Primary Motion Songs. These are objectionable; firstly, because children can do but one thing at a time *well*; that is, they will be entirely absorbed either in the words or the motions, probably the latter; secondly, because the exaggeration of rhythm makes of a child a hot blooded animal and not a sensitive soul; thirdly, because all reverent spirit is destroyed and the room becomes a turnverein rather than a place where God dwells. Let us not underestimate the moral value of silence. Mozart once said that the greatest thing about the "Messiah" was the measure of absolute rest that Handel introduced toward the close of the "Amen" chorus. There is too much rush, hippity hop, and "hurrah, boys," in our Sunday school sessions. We want to make things "go" which is right, but we must not miss the factors that are really germane even for little tots, such as orderliness, dignity, and cumulative power. In passing may I suggest that the songs for little ones be simple enough, devoid of abstract words or figures of speech, song stories of the home relations, of child feeling and life, not of adult experience and perception. The Society of Friends will not permit the use of hymns in public worship because they fear the words will be misinterpreted.

2. The Gospel Hymns. To these hymns we owe an incalculable debt, and fortunate it is that the best of them have been incorporated in our standard church hymnals. But many of the hymns that are flooding our market to-day are putrefaction and are not fit to live in God's pure air and sunshine. Imagine children of tender years singing such a wail as this (I quote from a modern song book):—

"I should like to die, said Willie, if my papa could die too,
But he says he isn't ready cause he has so much to do.
And my little sister, Nellie, says that I must surely die,
And that she and mamma—then she stopped, because it made me cry.
There will be none but the holy—I shall know no more of sin,
There I'll see mamma and Nellie, for I know he'll let them in;
But I'll have to tell the angel when I meet him at the door,
That he must excuse my papa, cause he couldn't leave the store."

It is a great mistake to "write down" to children both words and music. Nearly all children have a feeling for poetry and an ear for music. Why should we debase their tastes in the name of religion? In their impressionable, tender years it is so easy to stock their minds and hearts with the noblest and the best, the finest hymns and hymn tunes and the immortal oratorio choruses.

Gospel hymns as a class are unfitted for church use and particularly for child nurture because they deal with one phase only of the Christian life, namely, conversion, or they whisk one away to heaven. There is no middle ground, no growth in the graces of the spirit, no unfolding life. These hymns also teach introspection, self-consciousness and a stock taking of sins and shortcomings, which is a most undesirable attitude for children to take. Hymns of repentance, of invitation, of the call of the Christ, we must have, but let them woo the child in such tender words as, "Jesus calls us o'er the tumult."

3. Ultra Militant Hymns. In the reaction against Gospel hymns or the experimental type we have jumped to the other extreme, to the hymns of the "do and die" spirit, usually vague in thought, merely martial and exhilarating, with enough weapons, banners, conquests and victories to go around. Our Sunday Schools are flooded these days with aimless battle cries.

With these hymns contrast the noble hymns that acknowledge love and loyalty to a living Master, and though fierce the conflict, pledge a definite and willing service, such as:

"Christian, dost thou see them."

"Courage, brother, do not stumble."

"Fight the good fight, with all thy might."

Dr. John Watson was wont to say that the next revival would be ethical; that is, a wide spread enthusiasm for realizing the Christ spirit in private morals and social life. Perhaps if we had fewer warfare hymns we might have more philanthropic, fellowship, social service, and Christian citizenship hymns:

“Where cross the crowded ways of life,
Where sound the cries of race and clan,
Above the noise of selfish strife,
We hear thy voice, O Son of Man.

In haunts of wretchedness and need,
On shadowed thresholds dark with fears,
From paths where hide the lures of greed,
We catch the vision of thy tears.”

Perhaps if we had fewer childish and vapid Gospel hymns, many of the big boys might stand by the Sunday-school, particularly if they were not addressed as the “dear children” and urged to “sing out.” This custom of “talking down” to children shows itself in the music we are handing out in church and Sunday schools now days.

3. *The Music or Hymn Tunes of the Sunday School.*

Music is the language of the emotions, and when I speak of the emotions I do not mean the kind that are suppressed, as is customary and fashionable today; for instance, to admire feebly, to be interested rather than eager, disgusted rather than indignant, and so on down the list. I have in mind rather the child enthusiasms, the expressive warmth of a rich emotional nature, not the analytic chill of a degenerate critic. Emotion is quite independent of words and even of definite ideas; one can be elated or depressed without being able to reason it out. Here music steps in and voices all, without words, without program, without rationalizing. Painting, sculpture and architecture cannot compare with music in the expression of feeling, for the latter is a continuously unfolding picture, not a single static expression. It is this manifestation of every shade of feeling, of every passing fancy, that makes music the most natural expression of the child heart, and the truest utterance of the religious life, of that which is within, for both child and adult. The old Greek statesmen must have understood this power of music over young life when they went before the Athenian Assemblies and

argued for hours that the use of the Dorian songs would turn the youthful mind to honesty and valor, while the Lydian melodies were at once enervating and voluptuous.

There is nothing more blighting on child life than the singing of such church hymns as "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" and "O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go" to a ditty with a "tra la la" swing. There is a wedding of sense and sound in all of the best hymns and tunes, and what devout men have put together let no erratic publishers put asunder. Dykes, Sullivan and Barnby felt the deep devotional nature of the hymn tune when they wrote "Vox Angelica," "St. Gertrude," and "Sarum," but H. M. & Co., W. P. & Co., and T. & M. Co. put "Nearer My God to Thee" words to "Yankee Doodle" tunes and call it good!

In analyzing the emotional content of a hymn tune, it will be noted that melody is the rational, discriminative side of feeling; it is the intellect at work directing the emotions. Backed up by harmony, melody becomes a very vivid picture of elation or depression, of praise or prayer, without the help of any words. Melodies that express joy, exaltation, triumph, greatness of Christ's Kingdom, are of large range, high pitch and often daring intervals. Let the chorister or superintendent take five minutes of the Sunday school session each Sabbath to bring out the worship spirit of the hymn tunes, and he will be doing religious training of the most enduring sort.

While melody and harmony are the intellectual, rational side of music, rhythm is the physical, volitional side; it is the intensity of emotion that incites to action or calms down into inaction. By actual count out of thirty-six service hymns in a certain hymnal, thirty-two were found to be in four-four time; which means that the oft repeated accent, coming on every note in four-four measure, rather than on every third note as in three-four or dactylic rhythm, arouses the singer to action, to up and do for the Master. Throughout the middle ages, the only kind of measure allowed by the church was three-four or perfect time, because it stood for the three persons of the Trinity. This rhythm, of a gliding character, just suited the spirituelle, colorless, hymnody of cloister and dim cathedral. Common or four-four time came from the folk songs and dances of the common people, and introduced into church music the healthy human element of service.

Now children crave, and must necessarily have, more or less rhythmic swing in tunes; they are animals and love motion in songs. But let me voice this warning; the gusto with which children sing

certain catchy hymns, the enthusiasm that pervades great audiences in the singing of revival hymns, may after all not be spiritual rapture, but just the lowest physical exhilaration. We too often determine that to have everybody sing and sing heartily is the mission of congregational singing. Yet hundreds of "enraptured souls" sing popular hymns without the slightest thought of worship; it is such enjoyment as one feels at a dance or in marching down the street to a brass band. Shame on the irreverent spirit we have taught our boys and girls just through the hymn tune.

THE MUSICAL SERVICE.

HOW TO CONDUCT A MUSICAL SERVICE IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

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Ethically speaking it is a question whether the somewhat diluted sentiments and information gained from the new way, wholly compensates for the loss of the sturdy conviction and personal stand-by-your-guns faith of our fathers. Artistically and culturally speaking, there is no doubt that we are losing a great deal of the beautiful old music and suggestive forms of the chant, sentence, choral, even the hymn which formerly enriched the tradition of religious worship. To teach more Bible, to restore the spirit of worship, incidentally to use good music through which to voice our praise, to prepare children to love and take part in the church services is the object of the following and other programs given in the Teachers' College Sunday School.

OPENING EXERCISES.

Recessional.
Doxology.
Lord's Prayer—chant or repeat.
Psalm—chant or repeat.
Responsive Reading.
Hymn.
Story.
Hymn.
Processional to Class-room.